

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

- 27 Whereas the [Roman] king became a [pagan] priest and dishonored
our churches,
the Magian king honored the sanctuary.
His honoring our sanctuary has doubled our consolation.
[God] saddened and gladdened us but did not exile us.¹⁰⁵
He reprov'd that errant one by means of his erring counterpart;
since the priest oppressed, He rewarded the Magus.¹⁰⁶

105. Alternatively, the subject could be Shapur rather than God.

106. Again, the subject could be Shapur, translating as Beck, "while the priest oppressed, the magus rewarded." The more obvious sense, however, is that God reprov'd Julian by rewarding Shapur.

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Ephrem continues the argument he began in the previous hymns, that the loss of his city to Persia was a great divine lesson on the errors of idolatry. The keynote here is the coincidence in time of the raising of the Persian standard over the city and the bringing of Julian's corpse into the city, to which he has himself been witness (str. 1-3). The poet portrays himself mocking the corpse of the emperor and his presumptuous claims, meditating on the transience of temporal power as compared with God's, and mourning the folly of those who succumbed to the pretenses of Julian (str. 4-6). Next he addresses the principal difficulty in his view: the lengthy and inconclusive struggle for survival under Constantius (str. 7-12). The war remained without a decisive victory in the first half of the fourth-century not because the Christian God was unable to bring victory but because he was waiting for Julian's paganism to come into evidence so that he could serve as an example for all the world of the inefficacy of the Hellenic deities and their oracles (str. 7-9). Even Roman defeats under Constantius and the standard of the cross can be explained away as the fault of hidden pagans among the soldiers, just as Joshua's defeat at Ai was not a sign of the weakness of the Ark of the covenant but of the disbelief of some of the army (str. 10-11). Finally, Ephrem, to whom human freedom is supremely important, argues that Julian's death was the just and freely chosen consequence of his pride coupled with his stubborn refusal to admit the error of his religious beliefs and the injustice of his anti-Christian measures (str. 12-16). Divine justice and respect for human freedom does not, however, prevent God's providing an intricate interlacing of symbolism for the edification of all. In this case Ephrem discovers a fourfold mystery of lances (str. 14), and a pun linking Julian's mocking epithet of the "Galileans" with the angelic "wheels" of God's mighty chariot (str. 17). To his way of thinking these relationships serve as substantiation of his argument no less than the example of Joshua at Ai.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

3

1 A wonder! By chance the corpse of that accursed one,
crossing over toward the rampart met me near the city!
And the Magus took and fastened on a tower
the standard sent from the east,¹⁰⁷
so that this standard-bearer would declare to the onlookers
that the city was slave to the lords of that standard.

Refrain: Glory to the One Who wrapped the corpse in shame!

2 I wondered, "Who indeed set a time for meeting
when corpse and standard-bearer both at one moment were
present?"
I knew it was a prearrangement, a miracle of justice
that when the corpse of the fallen one crossed over,
the fearful standard went up and was put in place to proclaim
that the evil of his conjurers had surrendered that city.

3 For thirty years Persia had made battle in every way
but was unable to cross over the boundary of that city;
even when it had been broken and collapsed, the cross came down
and saved it.¹⁰⁸
There I saw a disgraceful sight:
the standard of the captor set up on the tower,
the corpse of the persecutor laid in a coffin.

4 Believe in "yes" and "no," the word of a trustworthy man,¹⁰⁹
that I went right up, my brothers, to the coffin of the filthy one,
and I stood over him and derided his paganism
and said, "Is this indeed he who exalted himself
against the Living Name and forgot that he is dust?"

107. Ammianus informs us that the standard was erected by the Satrap Bineses, as noted by Beck, cf. Amm. Mar. 25.9.1. But Ammianus takes this as the sign that all must leave the city, and he stresses Jovian's incompetence and his responsibility (rather than Julian's) for the situation; cf. Amm. Mar. 25.9.2-12. Like Ephrem, he praises the constancy of Nisibis, Amm. Mar. 25.9.8-11.

108. Cf. CJ 2.20.4 and CJ 2.19.

109. Cf. Matt. 5.37.

HYMN 3

[God] turned him back into his dust to let him know he was of
dust.¹¹⁰

5 I stood and wondered at him whose downfall I had so fully seen.
"This is his majesty and this is his pomp!
This is his kingship and this is his chariot!¹¹¹
This is a clump of earth that has disintegrated!"
I argued with myself, "Why in [the time of] his power
did I not foresee this would be his end?"

6 I wondered about the many who, in seeking to please
the diadem of mortality, denied the universal Life-giver.
I looked above and below and was amazed, my brothers,
that our Lord [is] His height, the Glorious One,
and the accursed one in [his] downfall, and I said, "Who will fear
this corpse and deny the True One?"

7 He prevented the cross that came down from gaining victory,
not because the victorious [cross] was unable to gain victory,
but so that a pit might be dug for the evildoer
who came down with his conjurers to the east.
But since he came down and was struck, the discerning saw
that the battle in which he would be put to shame had been lying in
wait for him.

8 Know that because of this the time was long and delayed
so that the pure one might complete the years of his kingship
and the accursed one might also complete the measure of his
paganism.¹¹²
But when he had completed his story, he came to ruin.
So both sides rejoiced, and so there was peace
through the believing king, companion of the glorious [kings].¹¹³

110. Cf. Gen. 3.19. The Syriac word *'pr* here translated "dust" and its derivative *'prn'*, "of dust," are different from the word "dust" in the previous line *dhyl'*.

111. The Syriac *mrkbt'*, rendered "conveyance" at CJ 2.4, may allude again to Julian's fleet, but it also has the sense of "throne" or "chariot," cf. CJ 3.17.

112. That is, Constantius was to finish his reign and Julian to complete his anti-Christian measures before God would permit a decisive end to the conflict between Rome and Persia.

113. That is, both Romans and Persians rejoiced at the conclusion of a peace treaty by Jovian, an orthodox Christian elevated by the *imperium* by the troops after Julian's death. Although Jovian, then, actually ceded Nisibis to Persia, Ephrem credits him with the peace but blames Julian for the loss of the city. Ammianus takes the opposite tack, cf. CJ 3.1 and note ad loc.

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- 9 The Just One by all [manner] of deaths was capable of destroying him,
but he kept [for him] a downfall fearful and bitter,
so that on the day of his death all things should be drawn up before his eyes:
Where is that oracle that reassured him?¹¹⁴
and the goddess of weapons that she did not come to his aid?
and the companies of his gods that they did not come to save him?
- 10 The cross of the All-knowing marched before the army.
It endured being mocked: "It cannot save them!"¹¹⁵
It kept the king in safety; it gave the army to destruction,
for it knew that paganism [was] among them.¹¹⁶
Let the cross of Him Who searches all, therefore, be praised—
[the cross] that fools without discernment reviled at that time.
- 11 For they did not persevere with the standard of the Savior of all.
Indeed that paganism that they showed in the end
was manifest to our Lord from the beginning.
Yet although He knew well that they were pagans,
His cross saved them, but when they apostatized from Him,
they ate corpses there; they became a parable there.¹¹⁷
- 12 When the People was defeated at Ai of the weak,
Joshua tore his garments before the Ark [of the covenant]
and spoke fearful [words] before the Most High.
A curse [was] among the People, without his knowing.¹¹⁸
Just so paganism was hidden in the army,
but instead of the Ark they were carrying the cross.
- 13 But Justice summoned him with wisdom,
for not by force did she govern his freedom.
By an enticement he marched out to the lance that struck:
he saw that he subdued citadels, and he became proud.
For adversity did not cry out to him to turn back
until he marched out and fell into the midst of the vortex.

114. Cf. CJ 2.9.6 and note ad loc.

115. Cf. Mark 15.29–32 et par. The cross was among the standards at the head of the Christian Roman army.

116. As Beck suggests, the events of 347 and 359–60 are meant here, and the "King" is Constantius.

117. The idea seems to be that the desperation of Julian's army in 363 became proverbial.

118. Cf. Josh. 7.1–26.

HYMN 3

- 14 The lance of Justice passed through the belly of him¹¹⁹
who despised Him Who made the lance of paradise pass away.¹²⁰
The divination of the conjurers tore open a pregnant [animal].
[Julian] groaned at length¹²¹ to recall
what he had written and published that he would do to the
churches.¹²²
The finger of Justice blotted out his memory.
- 15 The king saw that Easterners came and deceived him.
Simple men [deceived] the wise man; common men¹²³ [deceived] the
diviner.
Those whom he, wrapped up in his vestment,¹²⁴ summoned,
confined his wisdom by ignorant men,
and he gave orders to set fire to his victorious ships,

119. Julian was struck in the liver, cf. Amm. Mar. 25.3.6, and Bowersock, *Julian*, 116ff. Gregory Nazianzen similarly dwells on the notion that the "soothsayer" was wounded in the entrails; cf. Greg. Naz. Orat. 5.13. Unlike Ephrem, who does not mention who hurled the fatal lance, Gregory knew four different versions of this part of the story: that Julian's killer was 1) a Persian, 2) a disillusioned Roman officer, 3) a barbarian camp follower, 4) a Saracen desirous of fame; cf. Bowersock, *Julian*, 116 and J. Fontaine, *Ammien Marcellin, Histoire v.4.2* (Paris, 1977), 213f.n.528 and 251, n.623. Although he initially assumed that Julian's assailant was "some Persian," Libanius later became convinced that Christians conspired to kill him either directly or through the agency of "some Arab" (for the assumption that a Persian killed him, cf. Lib. Orat. 17.32; for the rejection of that notion and the implication that Christians were responsible, Lib. Orat. 18.274.5; for the Arab acting at his leader's command in expectation of a reward, apparently from the Christians, cf. Lib. Orat. 24.6; for Libanius' insistence that the miscreants are privileged Roman Christians and should be punished, Lib. Orat. 24.8, 11, 17–41). The notion of a Christian plot against the life of the apostate emperor was taken up enthusiastically by the fifth-century ecclesiastical historian, Sozomen (HE 6.2), and more recently by Gore Vidal in *Julian* (New York, 1965), 411–31. Recent biographers of Julian have been more sceptical. Browning leaves the question open, 213–15. After a considerably more detailed discussion, Bowersock concludes that the Arab is the most probable culprit. For this conclusion the corroboration of Philostorgius is crucial (HE VII.15, ed. Bidez, GCS 21, 101, Eng. trans. E. Walford [1855], cf. Bowersock, 117f.)

120. Ephrem refers to the flaming sword barring the way to paradise, cf. HdP 2 and Graffin, Cherubin.

121. This translation, suggested to me by Glen Bowersock, seems preferable to Beck's "[Gott] schlug [ihn] und er stöhnte."

122. Possibly Ephrem alludes to Julian's *Against the Galileans* (cf. CJ 3.17 and note ad loc.), but more likely to his legal measures or the threats mentioned in CJ 2.10.

123. Or "swarthy, dark-complected men."

124. That is, Julian was wrapped in a priestly vestment. I have taken the participle *στυρ* as masculine singular construct, dropping the final yodh of Beck's text. With that final yodh it could be plural but then should have *seyame*; in that case, those summoned would be in priestly vestments, but the vestment and its pronoun modifier are singular. Since the *στυρ* is normally the vestment or robe of a judge, king or prophet (cf. Margoliouth 569b), Ephrem seems to be mocking Julian's notion of himself as a wise man, diviner or priest.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

4

- and his idols and diviners were entangled in a trap.¹²⁵
- 16 But when he saw that his gods were confuted and exposed
and that he could neither gain victory nor flee,
[that] between fear and disgrace he was prostrate and beaten,¹²⁶
he chose death to escape into Sheol.
Cunningly he stripped off his armor in order to be wounded,
in order to die so that the Galileans would not see his shame.¹²⁷
- 17 For he had mockingly named the brothers Galileans.¹²⁸
Behold in the air the wheels¹²⁹ of the Galilean king!
He thunders in His Chariot; the Cherubim bear Him.
The Galilean revealed [the chariot]¹³⁰ and handed over
the flock of the soothsayer to the wolves in the wilderness,
but the Galilean herd increased and filled the whole earth.

125. Cf. CJ 2.18 and note ad loc.

126. Or "laid low and pulled apart."

127. Ammianus Marcellinus confirms that Julian was without his armor at the fateful moment, but he attributes this to Julian's rash courage; cf. *Amm. Mar.* 25.3.3-6, and *Lib. Orat.* 18.268. Gregory Nazianzen repeats Ephrem's accusation that Julian chose to die rather than to admit the hopelessness of his situation and the disgrace of his gods adding an apocryphal tale of Julian's attempt to throw himself into the river after being wounded, the better to be deified if his corpse were not found; for discussion, cf. *Greg. Naz. Orat.* 5.12, 5.14 and 4.59, the remarks of J. Bernardi ed., Grégoire de Nazianze, *Discours 4-5: Contre Julien*, SC 309 (Paris, 1983), 164-67, 314-21, and Bowersock, Julian 116.

128. No longer independently extant, Julian's anti-Christian polemic, *Against the Galileans*, has been reconstructed through Cyril of Alexandria's refutation. For the Greek text with English translation, cf. *Jul. Imp. Galil.* It has been carefully studied in Malley, *Hellenism*, and by P. Evieux, *Cyrille d'Alexandrie, Contre Julien*, T. 1, Livres I et II, Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes, par P. Burguiere et P. Evieux, SC 322 (Paris, 1985), esp. 21-58; cf. also Bowersock, Julian, 102.

129. Ephrem puns on *gll* the root of "Galilean" and *ggl* the root of "wheel" as well as *gl'* "to reveal." The "wheels" are one of the groups of angels, who are associated especially with God's chariot; cf. *Virg.* 36.9.1, also Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen*, 73-75, and Beck, *Reden*, 109.

130. Although Beck alters the text since he considers "revealed" to be out of the question, I have translated the received text under the assumption that the chariot is the direct object and that Ephrem alludes either to esoteric speculation on the chariot or, more simply, to the revelation of the power and majesty of God through these events; on the *merkabab* in Jewish sources, cf. Scholem, *Mysticism*, 40-79 et passim.

Having established both that Julian's death met the criteria of divine justice and that it was provided with clear symbolic indications of its importance for all, in this hymn Ephrem enlarges on its universal didactic purpose. That is, he returns his attention from the ethical lessons to be drawn from the faults of Julian as an individual to the lesson that Christianity is true whereas the emperor's paganism and his attempt to rebuild the Jewish Temple were mistaken religious policies. In tempting and persecuting the church, Julian had merely separated true believers from the false (str. 1-2). Had he only considered the signs, he could have realized the error of his ways. The wretched death of his uncle Julian was a clear warning for the apostate emperor of the death awaiting him (str. 3-4), but like Ahab, he preferred to listen to false prophecies (str. 5). Since he worshiped every other god except that of the Christians, it is abundantly clear which God is responsible for his defeat and ignominious death (str. 6). Likewise, the emperor's consultation of the best sorcerers proves the utter folly of their religion (str. 7).

As on the personal level, so on the religious level, Julian's death shows a kind of ironic suitability (str. 8-14). Foolishly he presumed that the god of the Babylonians would abandon his traditional worshippers to give victory to this upstart devotee (str. 8-11). Even had he found such extraordinary favor in the eyes of the sun-god as to be victorious over the Persians, Julian would have disproved his own religion by showing the injustice of its god and the folly of loyalty to such a tyrant (str. 12-14). The piety and modesty of Constantius, by contrast, were rewarded by his long rule and peaceful death (str. 15-16). Just as God used the sun to teach Jonah a lesson, He used an earthquake to teach a lesson to Julian and the Jews who accepted his plan to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (str. 17-20). The words of Daniel and of Jesus clearly state that the Temple will not be rebuilt and that this is the punishment for the crucifixion of Jesus (str. 21-23). The true consolation of Jerusalem and Zion lies not in the rebuilding of the Temple but in the visits of Christian pilgrims (str.